

Thanksgiving Day

November 23, 2016

Sermon Text: Luke 17:11-19

I can't tell you how many times my mom asked me: "Did you remember to say "Thank you?" Every single time I returned from my friend's house she asked that question. Every single time out came the groan: "Yes."

Growing up, I was always at his house. And of course, being in grade school, it meant his parents entertained us. They took us out to eat. They drove us to arcades and sledding hills. They rented movies and went to bed while we stayed up late. They let me sleep in his room and then wake up at whatever time. When it was time to leave, they drove me home.

I assumed his parents would do that. I assumed they would feed me. I assumed they would let me have fun. I assumed they would shut their bedroom door while we stayed up all night watching movies. I assumed they would let me sleep in their son's room and would have breakfast going whenever I crawled out of my sleeping bag. I assume they were prepared for my stay. I expected they were going to do these things. So, why do they need me to say "Thank you?"

And yes, I know that sounds incredibly selfish— especially right before our nation's day of thanks-giving. But does it really sound out of place? No one would say that Thanksgiving lasts only one day. Instead people insist that Thanksgiving occurs every day. That statement sounds good; it makes good sense. Yet, as good as it sounds, as much sense as it makes, our reading reminds us just how difficult it is to make Thanksgiving last every day.

Even Luke is puzzled over that. It almost looks like he's making sure he has the story straight. He writes: **One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice.** He doesn't only write it, but he emphasizes it. **"One."**

It leaves you wondering: Where did the other nine go? I mean, you just want to hunt them down and scream: "Come on guys! **COME, GIVE THANKS!**" After all, Jesus has earned it, right?

Luke 17:11-19

¹¹ Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance ¹³ and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

¹⁴ When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

¹⁵ One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. ¹⁶ He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

¹⁷ Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? ¹⁸ Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" ¹⁹ Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

He's travelling to Jerusalem, walking **along the border between Samaria and Galilee**. Then somewhere out there in the vast, desolate hill-country, **ten men who had leprosy met him**.

Their lives lie in complete shambles. The skin on their arms, shoulders, cheeks, nose, ears, and face turn snowy white. Blisters puff up and break open. Skin cracks apart, pus oozes out, and the infection spreads. In some cases your skin can peel off; the tips of your ears and nose can fall off! Doctors don't have a cure for this. There is no antibiotic, no cream, no treatment to stop and reverse the deteriorating disease.

To make matters worse, you not only lose your skin, but you lose your family! According to the Old Testament law, you had to live out in a desolate area, far away from people— somewhere like **the border between Samaria and Galilee** ([Leviticus 13:45-46](#)). So, you kiss your wife good-bye. You hug your little boy and cling to your little daughter one last time. Then you go— out of the city, out of society, out into the wilderness, out to a place where people who look like you live. Every single morning you wake up and you are reminded about the health, the family, the freedom you do not have.

So, imagine the sheer joy those ten men feel when they catch Jesus walking by. He is the answer to their prayers! He can cure them! He can restore life to normal! So, **They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"**

Do you see what Jesus does? He pities them! Yes, he is busy travelling to Jerusalem, but the moment they cry out, he stops walking. He turns, looks at them, and shouts back: **"Go, show yourselves to the priests!"**

And as they went, they were cleansed. That's it. "Go, show yourselves." No need to see Jesus wave his hand over their snowy spots ([2 Kings 5:11](#)). No need for Jesus to touch their skin ([Matthew 8:2-3](#)). Just the answer: **"Go, show yourselves!"**

That's all they needed to hear. At one point in life, they discovered that Jesus can help them. They shout— not out of desperation, not because this is their last chance— they shout because they believe Jesus has the power and ability to help. So, when they literally see Jesus answer their prayers, it just seems natural that they would **COME, GIVE THANKS**, right?

The truth is, it is not natural. If it was natural to give thanks, then we really would not need to set aside one national day to give thanks. What is natural is for our hearts to not give thanks. King David writes: *Surely I was sinful from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me* ([Psalm 51:5](#)). Another disciple writes: [That sinful nature] *is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so* ([Romans 8:7](#)).

And yes, chances are tomorrow you will mentally flip through every blessing you received this year. You will find many, many reasons to thank God for answering your prayers and giving you things you did and didn't know you needed.

Yet, I would guess you will have those moments where you stop and reflect on those myriad of times that you asked and received, but failed to respond. The times you continually pleaded for health and recovered, but failed to sigh as many "thank yous." The times fearful nervousness seized you, that you clenched your palms together, begging God to soothe your anxieties— and he did, but you did not have enough strength to pray: "Thanks!" Oh, that list of our failure to appear at his feet just unrolls: the times he allowed

your money to cover the bills, the time he delivered you safely through the snowstorms, the times he allowed new purchases to fall into your lap. The times he provides food and drink, house and home, clothing and shoes. The ways he watches over your coming and your going ([Psalm 121](#)). The promise to send his angels to keep harm away from you ([Psalm 91:11-12](#)). (There are many times when you faced no harm because his angels turned it away!) Do you daily return and fall at the feet of Jesus as you sigh out a heartfelt: “Thanks”?

At best, our record of giving thanks is streaky— and I would guess it is for the same reason those other nine did not return.

Where did the nine cleansed go? Were they home, arms wrapped around the wife and children they feel are more important than the Giver? Were they still vigorously shaking the hand of the priest who declared them “Cleansed?” Perhaps the healed nine (1) recognized they were healed and (2) chose not to thank Jesus. Still, I cannot help but wonder: Do you think they just expected Jesus to heal them? They assumed the Son of God must hear their cries? They assumed the Son of God must heal their skin? They assumed the Son of God would just move on to Jerusalem without ever having to see them again? The Bible doesn’t tell us where they went. Yet, we do know this: They loved what they received more than they loved the Giver!

Oh, how that sinful nature puffs up our possessions in order to block our thanks to the Source of our blessings! How that selfishness finds more value in what earthly things we own! How the temptation always remains to worship everything and anything but God!

I’m not sure one Thanksgiving Day is able to cure that sin. In fact, if we recognize our ungratefulness, the answer is not to scribble out ways to make sure to give thanks to God more often. The answer is not to give a larger offering or to promise not to be so unthankful. In fact, the reason we give thanks at all does not come from us; it wells up because of what has been done to us.

We don’t know where the other nine went, but we know where Jesus is going. Luke tells us he walks **along the border between Samaria and Galilee**— but this is not some random day trip. He’s travelling to Jerusalem, bound and determined to hand his life to death on a cross ([Luke 18:31](#)).

Out of the many things in this world, your Jesus has his attention on you! That means he

he is concerned about something more than just your health. He wants to give you something greater than food and drink, house and home, clothing and shoes. He answers a greater call than our prayers to just get through the day. And understand me rightly, Jesus makes it explicitly clear to unload your every need to him ([Luke 18:1-8](#)). He wants you to pray for the things you need. But don’t overlook how he satisfies your every spiritual need!

His sights lock-in on the cross, where he will place his obedience into your spiritual account. He breaks out of the grave of death, pointing to the same resurrection you will have. He unlocks heaven and describes the home he has prepared for you! He does all this without our asking. He does all this because he loves you.

No wonder the Samaritan returns, **throws himself at Jesus' feet and thanks him.** Of all people— a Samaritan! He is a half-Jew— half Jewish descent, half pagan culture. Samaritans did not look forward to the coming Savior; they worshipped the sun and trees. Samaritans did not interact with Jews and Jews ignored Samaritans. And yet on this one day, Jesus holds nothing back. **“Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”**

That is why the Samaritan returned. His faith recognized Jesus for who he is: the Son of God. Yes, the one who can heal his body, but the One who heals his soul. Out of thanks for such undeserved love, his praises come pouring out, showering Jesus with the praise deserves.

Keeping your eyes locked on the Giver is what makes Thanksgiving last more than one day. Instead of assuming God must automatically care for you, you see what steps he took in order to care for you. You see the Giver who marched up the mountain and back with forgiveness in his hands. And yes, his blood cleanses you from all guilt; his blood restores your spiritual life entirely.

As if heaven is not enough—your Jesus allows you and me the opportunities to take hold of his promises and trust he will keep them. And he does—giving us the food, home, clothing, friends, families that so often go unnoticed. Giving us the health, finances, comfort that we plead for. Your faith clings to a Savior who cares for you spiritually and physically.

What a reason for Thanksgiving to last every single day. What a reason for our Thanksgiving to last into eternity. Why wait until then? **COME, GIVE THANKS!**